



A Guide for Parents & Caregivers: Dealing with Homesickness



Each year thousands of students leave home for the first time to go to college. Most are filled with the enthusiasm and excitement of the college environment and their new found independence. However, for many the excitement is quickly over-shadowed by homesickness and feelings of insecurity. Homesickness is one of the most common adjustment problems experienced by students, particularly new students, who are moving away from home for the first time.

Some students may start by being mildly depressed and anxious several weeks before leaving home in anticipation of a major change in their lives. Some will experience homesickness within the first days or weeks and still others may find themselves feeling homesick for the first time late in the semester, perhaps after the holiday break or even as late as the start of the second academic year.

Almost everyone experiences some homesickness at some point in his or her life. In a way, homesickness is a positive emotion because it implies there is a place that you find familiar and comforting, where there are friends and family who care about you, and that you have learned to call home. On the other hand, homesickness doesn't feel very good. Sometimes people feel sad, vulnerable, like they don't fit. Minor problems seem more like catastrophes and sometimes leave one feeling anxious and depressed.

Here are a few tips to help you help your son/daughter cope with homesickness:

- Acknowledge that they are feeling homesick. It is a very natural and common response for students who leave home.
- Remind them that many other students are experiencing similar feelings, even though they may not talk about it right away.
- Encourage your daughter/son to talk with an older sibling, friend, or student who has gone away from home.
- Encourage them to put up some photos of home, family, and friends on the bulletin board. Suggest that they might mix the photos with photos of favorite campus buildings, activities, or events and new friends that have been made at Iowa.
- Urge them to get to know the Iowa campus and the surrounding community. Ask them to take a friend and explore interesting things to do and places to see. Ask them to share what they have learned with family and friends back home.
- Remind your son/daughter to get enough food and sleep. Proper rest and nutrition are important to emotional as well as physical well being.

- Inquire whether they're getting enough exercise and encourage them to use University facilities to "work out" (it's a great way to meet new people).
- Ask about their involvement in student organizations and activities. If they are living on campus, the residence hall is often a good place to get involved.
- Encourage them to keep in touch with the people back home but place a limit on telephone usage. Ask them to tell or write about their activities and experiences.
- Urge them to keep up on e-mail and "snail-mail" connections with friends at other colleges and universities.
- Set a date for them to come home and make arrangements. This helps to curtail impulsive home visits and helps ease the adjustments process.
- Give your daughter/son (and yourself) time to adjust. Overcoming homesickness is a gradual process for most. If their homesickness persists or interferes with their academic performance or social relationships, consider suggesting that they talk with someone at the University Counseling Service (UCS). Here is the UCS's contact information:

University Counseling Service
3223 Westlawn South
(319) 335-7294
counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu

